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Sent to Charles Davis

Rating

IDEOLOGY SEPARATES WHILE THE HEART BINDS

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The Colloquium on Emerging Religious Consciousness and in particular on the thought of Bernard Lonergan is a laudable attempt to understand how world unity could be brought about. While I agree wholeheartedly with the goal of unity, I have some serious reservations about the means proposed to achieve this goal. In particular, the attempt to base unity upon a shared ideological framework seems to me to place much too much emphasis on intellectual beliefs and a corresponding lack of emphasis on the nature of charity in act.

Let us take a look at Lonergan's concluding statement:

There is to Christianity an aspiration to universalism, e.g., 1 Tim 2:4. Perhaps the simplest explanation of this universalism would be that (1) the salvation of the Christian is in and through charity and (2) this gift as infra-structure can be the account of religious experience in any and all men. From this basis one may proceed to a general account of emerging religious consciousness, whether universalist, or ecumenist, or 'bottled effervescence', or alienated by secular or ecclesiastical bureaucracy, or seeking the integration of religious awakening with a fuller development of the second enlightenment, or distorted by human obtuseness, frailty, wickedness.

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Before we can proceed it is important to comprehend what Lonergan means by 'charity'. In the Colloquim he chooses St. Paul's description:

A classical formulation of Christian religious experience may be found in St. Paul's statement that God's love has flooded our innermost heart through the Holy Spirit he has given us. (Rom. 5:5) ²

It is no doubt true that most religious people have experienced grace in the form of 'expansion of the heart.', 'radiation of the heart', or 'overpowering by the Holy Spirit in the heart'. This personal experience, however, does not particularly explain Christianity. It is rather a precursor, or in some ~~xxx~~ cases, a preparation for living a Christian life. The true charity of Christians is to be willing to give one's life for others. "A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends." (John 15: 12-13) Christ has demonstrated this by his own life, and he has asked us to do the same thing with ours. "If a man serves me, he must follow me." (John 12:26) Christian charity then cannot be explained fully by the flooding of the heart with ~~love~~. It needs further development through emptying and consecration of self to God and to our neighbor.

Mother Theresa profoundly exemplifies this charity which knows no national, religious, or personal bounds. She says:

Some weeks back I heard there was a family that had not eaten for some days---a Hindu family---so I took some rice and I went to the family. Before I knew where I was, the mother of the family had divided the rice into two and she took the other half to the next-door neighbor~~s~~, who happened to be a Moslem family. Then I asked her: "How much will all of you have to share? There are ten of you with that bit of rice." The mother replied: "They have not eaten either." This is greatness. 3

The charity here is ecumenical in that it shatters ideological boundaries. The Christian took rice to the Hindu who shared it with the Moslem. In the Gospels Christ continually astonished his followers by breaking down ideological boundaries. He gave a Samaritan as the example of a good neighbor, he chose a tax collector to become one of his disciples, and he cured the child of a Roman Centurian. Peter, in his work in beginning

the church exclaimed: "The truth I have now come to realize
...is that God does not have favorites." (Acts 10:35)
~~Charity~~
~~Charity~~ does not act by creating a universalist ideology, it
acts through the gift of self to our neighbor.

The next obvious question we must ask ourselves is:
Does Lonergan emphasize 'flooding of the heart' in Insight
as he seems to in the Colloquium? His definition of charity
would lead us to conclude that he does:

Then charity is the transport, the ecstasy and
unbounded intimacy that result from the
communication of the absolute love that is
God himself and alone can respond to the vision
of God. 4

However, in another place he offers the deeper meaning:

It follows that love of God above all and
in all so embraces the order of the universe
as to love all men with a self-sacrificing
love. 5

From this we can reach two possible conclusions: First, that
Lonergan believes that charity is a self-sacrificing act, but
that he hides this belief in the Colloquium paper; or second,
that Lonergan does not really accept his own claim in Insight
and that he prefers the 'flooding of our inmost heart' notion.
~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ We cannot, of course, reach any definitive conclusions
about what Lonergan believes in his hearts of hearts. However,
it is significant to me that in the 748 page corpus of Insight
charity is only discussed on 5 pages, and even further, that
the self-sacrificing dimension of charity in act is only
mentioned once. If charity is so central to Lonergan's theory
then we are awaiting a more detailed discussion of its nature.
Similarly, unless he clarifies the self-sacrificing ~~xxxxxx~~
dimension of charity we will have to assume that his later version
in the Colloquium is more definitive.

Certainly Lonergan is correct in his assessment that we are entering into a new phase of understanding that is ecumenical at its core. It is a period of mutual respect among people of various religious backgrounds. A difficulty arises, however, when the emergence of a new consciousness is identified with clarity, ^{of understanding} as Lonergan does in the following passage from his Colloquium paper:

If consciousness has many meanings, so too will religious consciousness. There follows at once a basic clarification of what might be meant by "emerging religious consciousness", namely, the transition from lesser to greater luminousness, intensity, clarity, fullness. 6

This 'virtue' of the mind may not be an accurate description of what happens to religious people as they continue along the religious path. The Dark Night of the Soul by St. John of the Cross, a classic Christian text, demonstrates that spiritual development may often be accompanied by lack of luminousness, feelings of aridity, confusion, and emptiness. In the confusion of mind, the heart takes over:

In the happy night; In secret, when none saw me,
Nor I beheld aught; without light our guide, save
that which burned in my heart. 7

On the cross, Christ's cry to the Father: "Why have you deserted me?" (Mark 15:34) vividly reinforces this aspect of the Christian path. In other words, there is tremendous danger in identifying emergence even of consciousness with clarity. One may precisely emerge in and through darkness. ~~the~~

Lonergan's paper also raises some questions central to the nature of Christianity as a particular religion within the larger body of world religions. I suspect that the desire to achieve a unity through shared ideology leads Lonergan to conceive of a new emerging religious ideology which is above and beyond Christianity. This is sometimes referred to as a 'cosmic consciousness', 'universal consciousness', 'new world religion', etc. In these ideologies (which claim not to be ideologies as part of their ideology) the individuality of the various religions has vanished. Unity comes about

through dissolution of difference.

While I do not impute any intentionality of overturning Christianity to Lonergan it must be pointed out that there are certain central inconsistencies between his description of Christianity and the ~~teachings~~ of Christ. In the following example Lonergan is viewing Christianity afterwards, from the perspective of the new consciousness:

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At the present time specific discussion of emerging religious consciousness has to proceed on the basis of some convention. If it is not to be merely generic, it has to adopt the formulation of some particular tradition at least as a temporary or momentary convention
...When the choice falls on Christianity..... 8

The view that one can adopt the point of view of a particular religion and specifically of Christianity like one puts on and takes off a coat, 'as a temporary or momentary convention', is just not consistent with a fundamental Christian experience. Christ, in the gospels shows time and again that he calls his disciples, that he chooses them. " You did not choose me. No, I chose you." (John 15:16) The view that Christianity is primarily a call to follow Christ is inconsistent with the theologian's claim that one can 'adopt a Christian framework for purposes of discussion and study'. Christianity can not be understood unless it is experienced as a call; and a call is not a temporary or momentary convention.

For Christians the goal of world unity is stated in a very specific way. Christ said to his disciples:

When I am lifted up from the earth,
I shall draw all men to myself.

John 12:32

At the beginning of this paper I stated Lonergan's claim that 'what is unique in our time is the impetus towards unity of all world religions.' It is well known that wars, crusades, and coldness of heart has been for centuries a byproduct of the conflicting theologies found in different religions. It is also clear that unity of all persons was Christ's final

prayer. " May they all be one." (John 17:21) Christ believed this unity would come about by his death. If this is truly Christ's teaching, then world unity for Christians will come about by following the same path as Christ. Death to self means acceptance even of death to the desire for consolations such as the 'flooding of the inmost heart'.

Therefore, Lonergan's " Prolegomena to the Study of the Emerging Religious Consciousness of our Time" seems to pose some central questions. If he is to write a sequel we need to have the following issues clarified:

1. What does Lonergan mean by 'charity'?
2. How is clarity of understanding related to religious life?
3. What is the specific nature of the Christian response to emerging religious consciousness?
4. How can world unity be achieved and what is the specific function of the theologian in this task?

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FOOTNOTES

1. Bernard Lonergan, " Prolegomena to the Study of the Emerging Religious Consciousness of our Time", unpublished essay, 19-20.
2. Ibid. p. 19
3. Mother Theresa, A Gift for God, ed. Malcolm Muggeridge (London: Collins, 1975), p. 59.
4. Bernard Lonergan, Insight, Great Britain: Lowe and Brydone (Printers) Limited, 1958), p. 726.
5. Ibid., p. 699.
6. Lonergan, "Prolegomena", Op. Cit. p. 5.
7. St. John of the Cross, Dark Night of the Soul, trans. E. Allison Peers, (Garden City: Image Books, 1959), p. 34.
8. Lonergan, " Prolegomena", Op. Cit. p. 19.

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